

Arab League suspends Syria, imposes sanctions

By Charlotte Cloyd
STAFF WRITER

Unrest, protests and violence continue in the Middle East. On Nov. 12, the Arab League threatened to suspend Syria until its government, headed by president Bashar al-Assad, ceased violent attacks on anti-government protesters. In an emergency meeting held on Nov. 16, the Arab League confirmed the suspension.

Government loyalists protesting the suspension by the Arab League stormed the Saudi Arabian and Qatar embassies as well as the French and Turkish consulates, according to Al Jazeera. The Turkish government decided to promptly withdraw Turkish citizens stationed in Syria.

The Arab League has suspended Syria because of the extremely violent crackdown on anti-government protests that has resulted in an estimated total of over 3,500 deaths since March, according to CBC News.

Syrian president Assad, who has held office since 2000, has been criticized greatly by the international community for the violence that has taken place in Syria.

According to The New York Times, on Nov. 18, the Arab League decided to send

500 civilian monitors to Syria in order to check on the country's promise to end cruel and violent treatment of protestors. This decision was a surprising follow-up on their decision earlier in the week to suspend Syria altogether from the league.

The peace deal the Arab League extended to Syria on Nov. 16 offered to delay the suspension, on the condition that the government halt its violent crackdown on protestors and remove troops and tanks from cities.

In a New York Times article, reporters Aida Alami and Nada Bakri illustrated the Arab League's attempts to stop the rising number of deaths in Syria through extension of a peace deal.

"The draft resolution condemns the 'systematic' human rights violations by the Assad government, including 'arbitrary executions, excessive use of force and killing and persecution of protestors and human rights defenders, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including children,'" the New York Times reports.

In order for the Arab League to consider ending the suspension, Assad must end the human rights violations that his military is

currently carrying out.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued a call for Assad to step down from office. He challenged Assad to consider history and recognize the deaths of dictators because of their violent rulings against the people of their countries.

"If you want to see someone who has fought until death against his own people, just look at Nazi Germany, just look at Hitler, at Mussolini, at Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania," said Erdogan in a televised speech. "If you cannot draw any lessons from these, then look at the Libyan leader who was killed just 32 days ago."

Breakaway groups of protestors in Syria have admitted to engaging in violent disputes. Most recently, the Free Syrian Army — made up of army deserters — assumed the blame for attacking an intelligence station in a city outside of Damascus. In addition, on Nov. 14, government troops and military deserters engaged in a violent exchange that resulted in the death of several dozen people.

According to Mark C. Toner, a State Department spokesman in Washington, D.C., the U.S. does not have detailed or thoroughly accurate information on the

violent unrest in Damascus and across the country, but the U.S. still publicly opposes the violence occurring in Syria.

"We don't condone (the violence) in any way, shape or form, but let's be very clear that it is the brutal tactics of Assad and his regime in dealing with what began as a nonviolent movement (that are) now taking Syria down a very dangerous path," said Toner to the New York Times.

According to Al Jazeera, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke about the increase in violent disputes between army defectors and the national military.

"I think there could be a civil war with a very determined and well-armed and eventually well-financed opposition that is, if not directed by, certainly influenced by defectors from the army," said Clinton.

The Arab League issued a statement to President Assad indicating that he had until midnight on Nov. 19 to cease attacks and withdraw troops from cities.

On Nov. 26, the Arab League passed pending sanctions on Syria. The sanctions impose constraints on flights into the country, as well as putting a hold on the movement of money in banks and limiting the travel of Syrian officials.

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Nuclear weapon development in Iran raises new fears

By Travis Linville
STAFF WRITER

Weapons of mass destruction. Speculation and fear. Threat to the United States. Increasing tensions.

No, this is not Iraq circa 2003, but its Middle Eastern neighbor: Iran.

On Nov. 8, the International Atomic Energy Agency issued a report stating that Iran, claiming only to want nuclear-generated electricity, has taken steps toward developing nuclear weapons. The report has created fear and speculation among many Western nations.

However, after the long-lasting Iraq war, Americans are less likely to support another war over a nuclear threat. Robert Duncan, visiting assistant professor of political science, spoke about the potential for a U.S. military attack against Iran.

"Not going to happen," said Duncan. "No way. Nada. Zip. Zero. Zilch. No chance. The Israelis? Yes, maybe."

Israel distrusts Iran's motives. This distrust and the IAEA's recent report have resulted in Israeli and American efforts to halt Iran's program through economic sanctions. If the sanctions fail, Israel may pursue military action, said The New York Times.

"Right now, it seems like Israel or the United States is going to attack Iran for their potential to develop nuclear weapons, and that's not a legitimate reason," said Joe Cole, visiting assistant professor of philosophy. "It's not legitimate unless they actually have nuclear weapons and are planning to use them against someone. Only then is there a just cause for war."

Under the principles of Just War Theory, there must be a legitimate cause for war, such as a nation's self-defense against an immediate attack, a humanitarian crisis like genocide or starvation that shocks our moral conscience, or the support of a legitimate revolutionary or independence movement.

"The rhetoric of, 'They have nuclear weapons,' is used to scare the public," said Cole. "But that doesn't pass muster in international law. That's where double standards come in. We have nuclear weapons; we found out Israel has them, and they haven't signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. ... If we have our own, it's unfair for us to tell other countries that they can't have nuclear weapons."

Senior Claire Massagee, political science and information technology major, detailed the politics of nuclear weapon proliferation.

"I do not feel happy about the creation of any more nuclear weapons," said Massagee in an email interview. "However, I understand the motivations for wanting a nuclear weapon of

one's own. Some countries feel threatened by other nuclear powers, or perhaps they want extra leverage on the world stage."

However, several countries want to prevent Iran from gaining that leverage.

According to The New York Times, the U.S., Britain and Canada have implemented economic sanctions against Iran to weaken their potential for further nuclear development. Historically, however, issuing sanctions carries severe consequences.

"Sanctions against Iraq in the '90s — after we pushed the Iraqis out of Kuwait — put misery and suffering on the people," said Cole. "It's estimated that one million people died — half of them children — as a result of the sanctions and the bombings of hospitals, roads, and water-treatment facilities."

Governments opposed to Iran's nuclear program have supported the economic sanctions. The U.S. fears that sanctions could drive up the price of oil, increasing costs for U.S. consumers, netting eventual profits for oil-rich Iran. Because of this, Iran has not yet been placed under crippling sanctions.

However, there have been other setbacks to Iran's nuclear program.

One example was sabotage in the form of the Stuxnet computer virus in 2010, likely created by Israel and/or the U.S. The virus disrupted Iran's nuclear program but did not stop it completely. Massagee, working on a thesis project on Stuxnet, explained the worm and the potential for similar strategies.

"Similar forms of sabotage seem unlikely in the near future," said Massagee. "Stuxnet had many different versions, but once it was discovered, Iran likely took the necessary steps to eradicate it from the system to prevent further infection. And Iran is likely much more wary of such an attack. This worm took 10,000 man-hours to create, according to folks at Microsoft. It is unlikely an even more advanced and sneaky worm could have yet been created."

The Stuxnet worm only set back Iran's efforts. Iran will continue to develop their nuclear program, even amid increasing pressure from other nations.

"It's a cosmic conundrum," said Duncan. "They are on the path to developing nuclear weapons, and they're going to do that come hell or high water. As long as it's possible, they will keep pushing to develop them. That's the thing about (Iranian President Mahmoud) Ahmadinejad — he doesn't care what the international community thinks of him; he's immune to that pressure."

For an update on the recent developments in Syria and Iran see the News in Briefs, found on page 5.